1812.

A Few Observations on Sedatives, and Their Application in Practical Medicine

By

1811

Joseph Mosby Sheppard of Virginia

Nec semper feriet, quodcunque minabitur, Arcus.

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A few Observations on Sedatives, &c.

In defining any class of medicines it should be among the first considerations of the writer, to give in as concise and perspicuous a manner as possible some general idea of the system on which they act, and their Modus Operandi. To give such a definition of Sedatives, must I think be attended with some difficulty; Cullen so generally remarkable for his acuteness of perception, and nicety of discrimination, has defined sedatives to be; "Such medicines, as directly and without evacuation, diminish the motions and powers of the human system. Whether this definition gives a clear

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and distinct idea of the nature of sedatives or not, I leave to the candid reader to determine I must confess for my own part, that I think the terms, "Motions and powers" extremely vague and indefinite, and as conveying but little either of the nature or action of sedatives.

Professor James Gregory, of Edinburg, who has given a chapter of his conspect. theor. med. to Sedatives, goes a little farther than Cullen and says, "they lessen sensation", as well as, "repress motion;" but says nothing about evacuation, for he has in his list, Sedantia vacuantia, Narcotica &c. many of which, by the by, are among the most powerfull stimuli we have. His words are these, "Remedia sedantia dicuntur illa, quæ sensum obtundunt motum-que reprimunt." Although Gregory has

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been probably a little more definite than Cullen, yet he has by no means given us a distinct notion, of the properties and effects of sedative remedies and applications.

After having had the presumption to find fault with the definitions, given by two men so eminent in genius and the medical science as Cullen and Gregory, it might be supposed that I intended to give one more perspicuous and conclusive: This however I will by no means promise, but beg indulgence for a moment while I try to define the Term, in such manner, as that the nature and modus operandi of Direct Sedatives, may be more fully and completely exposed.

Next to the consideration formerly mentioned, should be that state of the system which we should regard as a standard, and from the operation of medicines on which

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state, we should judge of their properties. This state should be, no doubt, that of the most perfect health, in which all the moving stimuli of the system bear their exact proportions to each other, and in which there is a perfect equality of excitement. I am inclined to think this last consideration of the utmost importance, and without it we are liable to fall into perpetual error, for it is as well known that the same medicine will have different effects on different states of the constitution, as it is that different medicines will have different effects on the same state of the constitution. It was from inattention, I rather suspect, to this circumstance combined with others, that Opium and other narcotics, now known to be stimulants of the first order, were so long esteemed Sedatives; but without farther digression, we will proceed more immediately to the subject in hand.

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Direct Sedatives then are such medicines or applications, as when administered to the animal body in its most perfect and health-full state, act directly on the nervous and sanguiferous systems, and independantly of any sensible evacuation, as previous exhilera-tion, lessen sensation and thought, as well as the disposition to voluntary motion, rendering the pulse less full and frequent.

I believe the number of direct sedatives to be very few, and indeed some have denied altoga-ther the existance of such a Class of medicines I do not pretend to say that there are, strict-ly speaking, Medicines, of this kind, but that there are certain negative qualities of this kind, there can be no doubt. Such for instance is Cold, Darkness, Abstinence &c.

Of Cold

That Cold is a Sedative, although some have

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strenuously denied it, I think may be proven from many of the most simple phenomena of Nature; Ask the peasant of the country, why it is that in winter the trees have laid aside their foliage and the fields their verdure, why it is that he is no longer lulled at night by the buzzing of insects, and awakened in the morning by the warbling of birds, and why all nature seems to wear so calm, serene and sedate a countenance; and he will tell you in the honesty and simplicity of his heart, that all these sedative effects result from the absence of that universal and indispensible stimulant, ~~Heat~~.

As it is not my intention however, to discuss the subject at full, I shall assume it as granted, that cold is sedative, and go on to treat of the use of this class of medicines in the cure of diseases; In doing which I shall follow the order pursued by Dr. Rush in his learned and usefull course of lectures, leaving out blood letting, as I

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consider it as one of the Sedantia evacuantia. The order then will be, Cold, Fear, Rest, Abstinence, Darkness, Silence.

Of Cold; as a remedy for disease

In highly inflammatory fevers, cold gradually applied, or applied in such manner as merely to produce pleasurable sensations to the patient, has long been used with the greatest advantage. In pneumonia pleuritis, peripneumonade. attended with a full frequent and tense pulse, hot dry skin, topical pain, and other symptoms marking an highly inflammatory disease, Cold, combined with other antiphlogistic remedies, has been found to have the most salutary effects in reducing the fullness frequency and tension of the pulse, as well as the heat and dryness of the skin, soothing pain, allaying irritation, and producing sleep. Dr Thomas, of Salisbury, even goes farther than

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this, and says that, "In pleurisy, the application of cold on or near the part affected has been attended with salutary effects."x

In that species of delirium which sometimes attends inflammatory fevers, cold applications to the head, while at the same time sinapisms, or some other acrid stimulating cataplasm is applied to the feet, have been productive of too much benefit to be overlooked.

In some of the exanthemata or eruptive fevers, Cold has proven one of the best and most indispensible remedies. In variola or small pox, it has long been used in almost every way in which ~~it is used~~ it can be applied, with the effect of greatly reducing the inflammatory diathesis, and rendering the number of pustules comparitively few. In this disease, as

x Thomas's practice P. 118

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the quantity as well perhaps as the quality of the pustules seems to depend entirely on the violence and duration of the eruptive fever. It would certainly be of the utmost importance that this fever be checked in the commencement; for which purpose, nothing answers so well as frequent affusions of cold water on the patients body throughout the day, and constant exposure to a current of cool air, and even at night when the patient is put to rest, the temperature of his chamber should be such as to keep up a moderate sensation of cold

In the more violent cases of <u>varicella</u> or chicken pox, which is most commonly a

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mild disease, cold managed as above has proved extremely useful and efficacious.

In the incipient state of Scarlatina, Dr Currie has found the affusion of cold water to completely extinguish the disease, and to prevent either efflorescence or any affection of the throat from taking place. This is a practice however, which should be adopted only in the beginning of the disease, and even then with the utmost caution. This practice is also highly recommended by Dr Thomas, "The experience which I have had", says he, "not only of the perfect safety, but likewise of the high utility of sponging the body generally over, with cold water, in the incipient state of scarlatina where there is great heat and dryness of the skin, induces me to look on the remedy

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as a mean of decided releif, and to recommend the practice to be more generally adapted under such circumstances, than what it is.[x]

In Hemorrhagies of red blood, and particularly in that species of hemorrhagy, which has been called Active, Cold has been found of the most decided advantage. So far, indeed, was it superior to other remedies in hemorrhagies, before the revival of the use of sugar of lead in these diseases, for which we are so much indebted to Doctor B. S. Barton (whose usefull lectures give so much honour to himself and his country, and benefit to mankind) that it was almost totally relied on, in the more violent cases of this disease. That cold acts as a sedative in restraining hemorrhagies, at the same time exciting

[x] Thomas's practice P. 198

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its astringent properties, I think is even more than probable, and from its good effects in inflammatory fevers and hemorrhagies alone, I think we would be completely warranted in asserting it to be a Sedative power. whatever its action may be in restraining hemorrhagies, I can not but think it extremely analogous to that of the Sachar: Saturn:. This opinion is principally founded on some observations thrown out by Dr Barton in one of his lectures on this medicine, from which hints, I also think it entirely probable, that Sachar: Saturn: is a medicine whose properties are simply sedative and astringent.

As a topical application to external local inflammation, Cold applied by various means has been found essentially useful. Phleg-

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-monous inflammation, ophthalmy, hernia humoralis, and indeed almost every species of topical inflammation, to which cold could be immediately applied, has been resolved by it.

In some cases of Cynanche, particularly that kind affecting the tonsils,[x] nothing has proved so immediately beneficial as gargling the throat frequently with cold water, and I believe, the colder the water the better.

In erysipelas, cold applications have been frequently found prejudicial by increasing the constitutional symptoms, though at the same time the local ones were removed. and although Mr Saml Cooper recommends cold lotions &c. highly[||] in erysipelas, I can not but think ~~think~~ that they should be used with the greatest caution.

In some cases of Ulcerative inflammation, Cold

[x] Tonsillaris dicta.

[||] Coopers Surgery P. 30

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has been of equally great advantage. In those painfull and sometimes violently inflammatory ulcers, resulting from an inoculation for the variolus, and vaccine disease, nothing has been found so pleasant to the patient's feelings, or so efficacious in promoting the cure of the ulcer, as a stream of cold water frequently poured on the part effected.

In those cases also of sore legs in which there is a considerable degree of inflammation present, or in which the granulations are extremely tender and weakly, nothing has been of greater service than a stream of cold water long applied, and at frequent intervals.

Strangulated Hernia has sometimes yielded to cold applications in the form of powdered ice, or otherwise, when every thing else had been tried in vain. To what extent however, cold may be applied in these cases, on this side of freezing, or

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what would be the consequence of returning so tender and organ as an intestine, while in a state of intense coldness, into so warm a cavity as that of the abdomen, experience does not ~~not~~ warrant me in determining.

In those painfull and violently distressing injuries of the joints, which have commonly been called Strains, and to which the ankle joint is particularly liable, Dr Physick, whose experience and observation are so extensive, has found nothing to produce effects so salutary, as frequent and copious effusion of cold water on the part affected.

In cases of Contusions, and extravasation[x] of blood from contusion, cold has been found of particular service in preventing the accession of inflammation, and allowing the absorbents time

[x] Ecchymosis dicta.

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for completely removing the effused matter.

Of the complete safety and decided utility of affusions of cold water in the Typhus Mitior, or nervous fever, I believe there is no longer room for doubt. The effect of cold in this fever has, by some, been thought a powerfull argument in favour of its possessing stimulating properties. For my own part, I think the modus operandi of cold in this disease, might be explained on principles entirely different from those of its being a stimulant power; as my intention however is merely to state a few matters of fact, I shall not pretend to investigate the subject farther here.

Of Fear.

As fear may be considered a powerfull sedative I have introduced it among others, into my

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list; but I must confess that I know but little of its uses in Medicine. I believe however that it has been principally used in those cases of Furious Madness, in which no sedative of a milder nature would have any effect in restraining the refractory desires and inordinate actions of the Maniac. To what extent it has been usefull in these cases, I cannot pretend to determine, but rather suspect, that even in the milder cases of this disease, Moderate fear, properly excited, is of advantage.

Rest, Abstinence, Darkness and Silence, have long been considered among Medical men as belonging, to what has been called the Antiphlogistic Plan or Regimen. Rest and Abstinence I consider as essential, in all prescriptions for inflammatory diseases, whether general or local, as blood

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letter J. Cold, or any other remedy. In Delirium Ma-
-nia, and many other diseases in which the head is
principally affected, total darkness with complete
silence has been attended with the happiest effect.
In every species of Ophthalmy, and particularly
in that one, affecting principally the membranes[x]
of the eye, the total exclusion of light from that
delicate organ, has greatly diminished the suf-
-ferings of the patient ~~of the patient~~, and ex-
-pedited the cure of the disease.

With this, I conclude this short and very im-
-perfect essay.

x Ophthalmiae membranarum.

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Cholera Infantum.

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33 Withers
36 Banks
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